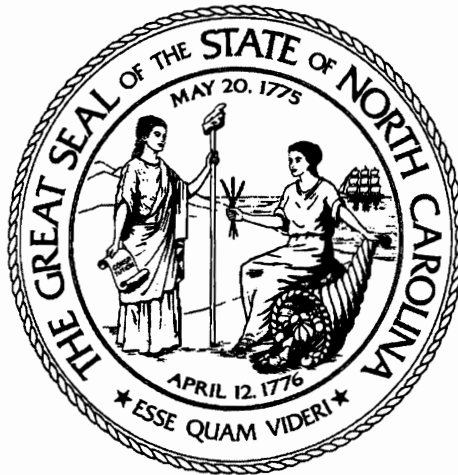


**HOUSE SELECT STUDY COMMITTEE**  
**ON**  
**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**  
**AND DROP OUT RATES**



**REPORT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**2007 NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA



HOUSE SELECT STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION  
AND DROP OUT RATES

March 7, 2007

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE 2007  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Attached for your consideration is the final report to the House of Representatives of the 2007 General Assembly. This report was prepared by the House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates pursuant to G.S. 120-19.6(a) and Rule 26(a) of the Rules of the House of Representatives of the 2005 General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Earline N. Parmon".

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Representative Earline Parmon, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas E. Wright".

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Representative Thomas Wright, Chair

- Strategies, programs and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs and support services;
- Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students;
- Possible exemptions from the law for certain students, including those who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory age;
- The fiscal impact on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction; and
- Input on the issue from school personnel, dropouts, and students at risk of dropping out of school.

**“A student who graduates from high school is less likely to grow up and live in poverty and has a much greater chance at a prosperous and rewarding future,” said Rep. Earline Parmon (D-Forsyth), who will co-chair the new committee. “I’m hopeful this Committee will discover how to increase graduation rates and, by association, how to improve the lives of the young people of North Carolina.”**

**“Our state’s drop out numbers are unacceptable,” said Rep. Thomas Wright (D-New Hanover), who will co-chair the new committee. “We need to find out why our students are leaving school and how to keep them there.”**

State Board of Education Chairman Howard Lee has called on the General Assembly to change the state’s compulsory age law, which currently allows a student to drop out of school at 16 years old. “We do students a disservice to send the message that it is acceptable to drop out of school when they are 16 years old,” Chairman Lee said in March in response to the release of the latest drop out statistics. “A high school diploma is a minimum requirement for future success, and we will continue to press for changing the compulsory school attendance age.” Raising the compulsory age is one issue that the House Select Committee will examine in the coming months.

*Education Week Magazine* recently cited a national study showing North Carolina’s high school graduation rate at 66 percent. Among African American males it is 49 percent and Hispanic males graduate only 47 percent. North Carolina’s high school dropout rate, already too high, may be even worse this year, the state’s top-ranking education official warned last week. State Superintendent of Public Instruction June Atkinson said the state’s annual report on high school dropouts is due to be released in December. School officials shouldn’t expect encouraging news, she said during a speech in Elizabeth City.

During the 2004-05 school year, approximately one out of every 20 North Carolina high school students dropped out of school thus jeopardizing their potential for future success, according to the Annual Dropout Event Report presented to the State Board of Education in March. This equates to an annual high school drop out rate of 4.7 percent. State law requires that school officials record the reason for a student’s decision to drop out of school. In 2004-05, 60 percent of students dropped out due to attendance issues. Other

Researchers will then conduct site visits in districts with low-performing high schools to identify how they can better use resources to increase student achievement.

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates will hold numerous meetings between now and the start of the 2007 session, which convenes on January 24. The Committee, which includes former school teachers and principals, will present its legislative recommendations to the full House of Representatives at the start of the 2007 session. Legislators are expected to hold meetings in Raleigh and in other cities across the state as they study the state's high school graduation and drop out rates and look at possible solutions.

old to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students."

Next, Dr. Chris Cobitz, Reporting Section Chief for Accountability Services. DPI explained the new cohort graduation rate (See Appendix D). Later this year, the State will be able to report the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> graders who began in the 2002-03 school year and graduated before June 30, 2006. This is a standardized reporting method that will allow comparison with other states. Finally, Dr. Ken Gattis, Senior Research and Evaluation Coordinator, DPI explained the current definition of a dropout, how the dropout rate is calculated and information about the demographics of dropouts.

## **November 2, 2006**

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates held an evening meeting at West Charlotte High School. The Committee heard presentations from the speakers listed on the following agenda about restructuring a large high school into smaller schools within a school, the importance of nontraditional and alternative schools, a successful community-based program aimed at preventing drop outs, and the partnerships that the community college and local public schools have developed to address the dropout problem. Members of the public not listed on the agenda were invited to address the Committee with their concerns, especially about the need to raise the compulsory school attendance age. A summary of the minutes from this meeting can be found in Appendix A.

### **AGENDA**

**November 2, 2006**

**6:00 P.M., West Charlotte High School  
Charlotte, NC**

#### **Welcome/Introductions**

**Representative Parmon, Cochair  
Representative Wright, Cochair**

#### **Approval of Minutes**

#### **Speakers**

**Ann Clark**, Assistant Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

**Jo Ella Ferrell**, Principal, Garinger High School

**Carol Rodd**, Case Manager, Garinger High School

**Brian Freeland**, Teacher, Garinger High School

**Natasha Thompson**, Principal, International Studies School at Garinger High School

**Herman Gloster**, Teacher, International Studies School at Garinger High School

**LaPorsha Holt**, Student, International Studies School at Garinger High School

Haywood Early College

**Dr. Doris Hipps**, Dean/Principal

WIA Gateway Recovery

**Kyle Ledford**, WIA Youth Program Manager

**Steve Williams**, Student Services Director

Students

**Jason King**  
**Ashley McCall**

Program Discussion

**Danny Miller**, Principal  
**Dale McDonald**, Principal  
**Donna Parris**, CHHS Teacher

Parents

Haywood County Board of Education

**Robin Black**, Finance Comm. Chairperson  
**Michael Sorrells**, Bldg and Grounds Comm.  
Member

Lunch at the Education Center

Visit Central Haywood High School

### **December 20, 2006**

The Committee held its final meeting and discussed the proposed recommendation and legislation. The Committee voted to adopt the final report.

Committee also heard some of the pros and cons for raising the compulsory school attendance age. The Committee also heard about the necessity for additional vocational/technical education classes for students who would be going straight to work after graduation.

Due to the short length of time that the Committee has been in existence, there was not adequate time to make a comprehensive examination of all the issues that it was charged to study. The Committee had also only begun traveling across the State to gather public input on the issues and to learn about successful programs. Therefore, the Committee makes the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION: CREATE A JOINT LEGISLATIVE STUDY COMMITTEE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND DROP OUT RATES.**

The House Select Committee on High School Graduation and Drop Out Rates encourages the General Assembly to enact legislation to establish a Joint Legislative Study Committee to continue to examine ways to improve high school graduation rates, the need for increasing the compulsory school attendance age, and ways to ensure that all North Carolina citizens are prepared for the world of work or to succeed in higher education. (See Legislative Proposal on Page 12.)



clerical support staff to the Committee, and the expenses relating to the clerical employees shall be borne by the Committee. Members of the Committee shall receive subsistence and travel expenses at the rates set forth in G.S. 120-3.1, 138-5, or 138-6, as appropriate.

**SECTION 1.(b)** The Committee shall study the need to raise the compulsory school attendance age, methods for increasing the high school cohort graduation rate, and methods for lowering the dropout rate. In connection with this study, the Committee may consider and report on:

- (1) The impact of dropping out on the student;
- (2) The capacity of a 16-year-old to understand the social and economic consequences of dropping out of school;
- (3) The emergence of major high school reform efforts, including Learn and Earn Programs, the New Schools Initiative, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools, and the impact they may have on teenagers who remain in school longer;
- (4) The importance to the entire State of every student leaving high school prepared to enter the workforce or succeed in higher education;
- (5) Research on factors related to students' success or lack of success in schools;
- (6) Strategies, programs, and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs, and support services;
- (7) Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students;
- (8) The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory attendance age;
- (9) Possible exemptions from the law for certain students; including those students who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory school attendance age;
- (10) The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory school attendance age on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction;
- (11) The law in other states and the experience of other states that have raised the compulsory school attendance age;
- (12) Input from school personnel and from dropouts and students at risk of dropping out on the issue;
- (13) Any changes that are needed to the definition of a dropout and any changes in data collection to ensure consistency and accuracy in reporting the dropout rate;
- (14) Proven strategies and early intervention programs that can be implemented to prevent at-risk youth from dropping out, especially in the middle grades;

## Appendix A

### **Summary of the Minutes from the Meetings in Charlotte and Haywood County**

(A notebook containing the complete minutes for each meeting and all information presented to the Committee is filed in the Library in the Legislative Building.)

**Thursday, November 2, 2006**

**6:30 P.M. / West Charlotte High School, Charlotte, North Carolina**

**Ann Clark, Assistant Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools** – Ms. Clark introduced herself as the regional superintendent of high schools in Charlotte. She said that the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System has tried to create programs that foster choices among students and parents. The school system has also acknowledged that the comprehensive, traditional ninth to twelfth grade high schools are not models that work for many students, particularly those students in larger urban districts.

Ms. Clark reviewed several programs used by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System to help students stay in school and receive a high school diploma. The first initiative at Garinger High School is the creation of two small specialty high schools within the larger facility. Because ninth grade is the grade level where, traditionally, the largest number of students is lost in the transition to high school, both high schools opened classes with only a ninth grade. Ms. Clark explained that the committee would hear Garinger High School administrators, teachers, and parents give their observations about the initiative. The next initiative, the Performance Learning Center, is a small non-traditional, stand-alone high school that is a partnership between Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and Communities in Schools (CIS). Through this partnership, the Performance Learning Center (PLC) is considered a role model for successful dropout prevention programs. This model is implemented in nine Charlotte-Mecklenburg high schools and several middle and elementary schools. Ms. Clark also recognized the Bright Beginnings Program, a unique dropout prevention program, for four-year olds, which gears younger students towards a more successful path in their K-12 education.

On behalf of all the high school principals in Charlotte, Ms. Clark urged the committee to look at and carefully review how students are coded as dropouts for reports, particularly those students who go on to community colleges.

#### **Garinger High School**

**Jo Ella Ferrell, Principal** – Ms. Ferrell thanked the committee and welcomed them to Charlotte. To address the challenges of dropouts, Garinger High School has the services of a case manager to work with individual students. Ms. Ferrell introduced Ms. Carol Rodd and asked her to speak about some of the students that she has personally assisted.

**Carol Rodd, School Social Worker/Case Manager** – Ms. Rodd explained that her role was to provide intensive case management services. Specifically, she has a caseload of 50 students that are deemed “at-risk”. She gave an anecdotal account of two at-risk students

**Herman Gloster, Teacher** – Mr. Gloster stated that he was excited about the possibility of raising the dropout requirement age from sixteen to eighteen, but challenged the committee to also raise the expectations of high school students. Mr. Gloster stated that among the various reasons that students drop out; perhaps the largest problem is that many students are not motivated to learn for their own good but because learning is expected of them by their teachers and parents. He believes that college should not be considered an option, but a necessity. He said that students need to overcome their own social stereotypes and change them by taking the steps to become successful. Lastly, he recommended that the committee ask students how to change the dropout rates.

**LaPorsha Holt, Student** – Ms. Holt, a freshman student, explained that she almost dropped out of school. She said that she had lost motivation because of a lack of support and poor performance in the classroom. Two of her siblings had already dropped out of school. However, her current year at the International School had given Ms. Holt much more motivation to become successful. Smaller classes and personal interaction with her teachers had motivated her to become a better person and student.

### **New Technology High School at Garinger High School**

**Barry Blair, Principal** – Mr. Blair explained that his school, the New Technology High School, is the other small high school that opened on the Garinger campus earlier this year. Mr. Blair explained that at his high school, technology is used as a tool for improving instruction and student interest. Students focus on pursuing careers in the technology field. Each student has a computer and the curriculum is project-based learning.

Mr. Blair described several benefits of having a small school setting. First, the high school has a ‘family-like’ atmosphere, which welcomes students into a supportive environment. The small school setting also allows Garinger to involve the school social worker as well as all of the stakeholders in the community. The school also promotes hands-on experience, a technique that goes beyond reading and taking a test. Mr. Blair explained that this technique is particularly successful with young males who often need to learn kinesthetically; giving them the opportunity to move, using their hands and their minds as well.

**Erica Luttschyn, Teacher** – Erica Luttschyn, World History teacher, explained that the small class size and the project-based learning style allow the faculty to monitor the students more closely. She has a class size of eighteen students that allows her to closely monitor student attendance. Project-based learning requires students to work in groups. Ms. Luttschyn stated that the process establishes more responsibility and accountability among the students. The New Technology School is also unique in that it is web-based, meaning that a student’s progress and grades can be tracked online by both the students and their parents. Lastly, Ms. Luttschyn stressed that the New Technology School actively involves its parents and has strong relationships with them.

**Basma Metwally, Student** – Ms. Metwally said that the small environment helps students to get to classes faster, helps them to bond with teachers and build close relationships with one another. After school tutorials help students to improve their grades and parents are able to view student progress on the computer. She believes that these aspects of the small school help to decrease the dropout rates.

**LaTasha Harris, Student** – Ms. Harris explained that the school truly promotes a family atmosphere. Compared to her old school, the PLC provided much smaller class sizes and better interaction with the faculty. The school is geared towards helping students go to college. Ms. Harris stated that she previously had a high level of absenteeism, but that the overwhelming support and interaction with teachers had encouraged her to come to school everyday. Ms. Harris concluded by stating that the PLC has encouraged her to attend college.

Ms. Harris said that raising the dropout age to eighteen would motivate students to finish high school.

**Matthew Brady, Student** – Mr. Brady introduced himself as a senior student at the PLC. Mr. Brady described the PLC as a godsend, because it came at a time in his life when he needed motivation in school. During the previous year, in regular high school, he was distracted and had a lot of absences that led him to fail. At the PLC, he is currently taking thirteen classes and that will allow him to graduate on time with all of his friends back at his old high school. Mr. Brady stated that the staff at PLC looks at their students as family members which helps to motivate the students to succeed.

Mr. Brady stated that raising the dropout age requirement would give students two more years to grow and mature.

Principal Sherry Signmon stated that currently the school has eighty students and will be expanding to their capacity of 100 students. The school is a nontraditional school that teaches academics in a nontraditional way through computer-based instruction. Ms. Signmon stated that the PLC does not take any student that has not already been in the ninth grade at another high school because they first have to experience high school. The majority of the students at the PLC are repeaters, sometimes two and three year repeaters. The grade levels are nine through twelve.

**Dr. Ricky Woods, Senior Minister, First Baptist Church -West, Charlotte, NC** –

Dr. Woods explained that his church, First Baptist Church -West, has a fourteen- year -old volunteer tutorial program that began at Oaklawn Elementary School. The church is now moving forward with a new program that focuses on working with a number of elementary schools with high risk children. Dr. Woods explained that in 2003 the church formed a non-profit organization called First Baptist Church West Community Service Association to oversee their community-based operations. This process included the involvement of area principals, community residents, church members and parents to find out what kind of programs they needed to provide to insure the success of their children. Dr. Woods described the creation of another program in 2003, an after school and summer program that focuses on academics and fine arts. He recognized Ms. Patrice Thompson and Ms. Patsy Burkins who further described their programs.

**Bobby Sutton, Associate Dean for Community Development, Central Piedmont Community College** – Mr. Sutton said that this department houses the basic skills programs which include GED and Adult High School. He stated that first and foremost they do not encourage anyone to drop out of school. He also felt that raising the dropout age from 16 to 18 would be a good idea. If that happens, Mr. Sutton requested the

has had problems with her son who dropped out of high school. He was a former honor student and dropped out of high school in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade after he got involved with the wrong crowd. Ms. Penn stated that she encouraged her son, who enrolled and graduated at Central Piedmont Community College, to complete his high school degree. Ms. Penn emphasized the influence of peer pressure on children and particularly her experiences with her teen-age children. She stated that children need direction from the entire community.

**Brother KoJo** - Brother KoJo commended the speakers from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System for the work that they are doing. However, he worked in a school that was not doing well. He stated that even though the programs that were presented were doing well, there were also many schools and students that were struggling. He worried that there is a resurgence of racism in the United States. He was especially concerned about inner city schools that are predominately one race and where many low-performing students, students with low self-esteem, and low income students are in attendance. In these schools, teachers spend most of their time trying to control their class rather than teach those who want to learn. Brother KoJo stated that all children need to succeed and that schools need to accommodate students so that everyone can learn.

Brother KoJo said that the system needs to balance schools. Children do not need to be separated as far as education levels and income. Instead, Brother KoJo stated that if a struggling child was placed among children with positive attitudes, then the struggling child will emulate that positive behavior.

Brother KoJo agreed that the dropout age should be changed. However, the committee would need to look at stronger truancy laws that would force children to go to school. Other states, such as Florida, punish the parents for poor student attendance. If students know that their parents will go to jail if they do not attend school, then they will go to school.

**Dr. Becka Tait, Pediatrician, Teen Health Connection** – Dr. Tait introduced herself as a local pediatrician. She explained that medical research has found that during the years of adolescence, children's brains are still growing and maturing. She strongly advises raising the compulsory age to eighteen for biological reasons.

Dr. Tait also asked the committee to make a strong truancy mandate. She described young adolescents whom she had observed that had already made up their mind to drop out long before they were sixteen. She stated that a stronger truancy program with punishments and rewards would motivate students to be successful.

- *Dr. Doris Hipps, Dean of the Haywood Early College.* This is a new program and affords students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and a two-year college degree in a five-year period. We enrolled 56 freshmen this year and intend to add one class of freshmen each year for the next five years until we have a graduating class of students who have earned both a high school diploma and college degree. There are a number of obstacles that we have worked through to make this program work. One example of a challenge is that the high school calendar includes 180 instructional days while the community college calendar is 160 instructional days. There are other issues like that that you may be able to help us with.
- *Kyle Ledford, Manager of the WIA Gateway Recovery Youth Program* - We have had challenges. The high school databases don't accept college credit numbers; but we have been able to make that happen and the legislature may be able to open some other doors for us. We have over 20 students that were dropouts who are back in the adult high school and we hope they will graduate from Central Haywood High School either at the end of the first semester or at the end of the year.
- We have *two students Jason King and Ashley McCall* that will speak to you about their experiences.
- *Danny Miller, Principal of Pisgah High School, Dale McDonald, Principal of Tuscola High School and Donna Parris, CHHS Lead Teacher* will speak with you.
- Several board of education members will then speak with you. *Robin Black, the Board's Chairperson of Finance*, will have some ideas for you in terms of how financially things might be organized differently to support graduation rates.
- *Michael Sorrells* will speak about buildings and grounds as it relates to graduation rates."

Dr. Nolte continued by requesting that the legislature focus on removing barriers rather than imposing more restrictions. A few ideas:

Allowing students to transfer to the community college in a legitimate high school graduation program or adult high school graduation program at a community college or university and not calling the student a dropout.

Making sharing courses between the community college and high schools more accessible. For example, if the Haywood County Schools offer a course at Tuscola High School, the community college cannot offer that course for us at another public high school. Our two traditional high schools are on different schedules. One's a seven period day- one's a block schedule, we like that. We ask that you would allow us to form local partnerships; school systems with neighboring colleges and universities and allow the college/university and the school system to determine the courses that are appropriate for graduation.

### **Culture & Climate**

Innovated an incentive program for high achievement on EOC tests, maintaining good grades and good attendance

Hold individual recognitions for students each week to celebrate achievements

Provide fun activities for each three weeks of classes; including movies, games, socials, dancing, popcorn, snow cones, and drinks

### **Professional Development**

Write grants and get money for staff development

Mentoring Program, including tag teaming with other high school teachers

Attend Superintendent's Roundtables and attend staff development workshops

### **Parent/Community Involvement**

Teachers contact parents at least 3 times a semester

Hold a Thanksgiving Dinner for students, parents and Central Office staff

Faculty Ballgames

Recognize the Partners in Education Rotary Students of the month

Hold a prom

### **Curriculum & Instruction**

Reduce credit requirements to 22 units

Fast track when possible to get students graduated

Use NOVA net as means of course recovery

Alternative scheduling – run a 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> period block

Let some students from other high schools take courses, after their regular school day is over, at the alternative high school in order to stay on track for graduation

### **Monitoring & Assessment**

TPAI Evaluations of staff

EOC tests for students

VOCATS tests for students

Reward Systems: A Honor Role, A/B Honor Role, Perfect Attendance, PRIDE awards, letters to parents, calls to staff (Alert Now), Home visits

Mr. Pressley stated that there were 85 students enrolled. Enrollment is capped to keep the student/teacher ratio low. Mr. Pressley stated that there are 14 certified staff members. They do share some instructors with Haywood Community College that instruct a couple of classes. They also share a couple of instructors with Pisgah High School. The student/teacher ratio is between 1 to 10 and 1 to 8.

Mr. Pressley described how the students are selected to attend the school. He said that usually they are the students that will do better in a smaller setting. They may have fallen behind but they would probably have a better opportunity if they were in an alternative school setting. The decision is made by the principal of the respective high schools. During the intake process, the parents, the student, the alternative school principal, and a guidance counselor meet and discuss the expectations for students at the school, including the dress code. Then a sheet listing the goals that the student and parent would like to achieve is signed and held in a folder. Periodically the goals are reviewed during the year to see how the student is progressing.



program to allow them to continue in an adult high school, without the stigma of being counted and labeled as a high school dropout.

The Early College Program allows each site to set the particular criteria that they think is appropriate and important for their particular community. Here at Haywood Early College our application process makes the students get a letter of recommendation from two people within their middle school program. We get a transcript of their grades. While the students may not be straight A students they have proven by State testing standards that they have a lot of ability. They come from homes with parents who did not complete a college degree and many of them did not complete a high school diploma. The students for the most part do not have a discipline file. They are well behaved and have an interest but really don't have the financial means to see a future in college.

**Mr. Steve Williams, Student Services Director for the WIA [Workforce Investment Act] Gateway Recovery Program** - He stated that in many cases the traditional schools have been unsuccessful in keeping a child from dropping out. Students drop out for a number of reasons. This program steps in when the schools have exhausted the opportunities to retain a student and keep them from actually dropping out.

The goals of the WIA Youth Program are to:

1. help students
2. address the dropout rate; reduce the number of dropouts for our school district
3. increase the number of students who graduate

"We were fortunate enough to sit down with the guidelines and parameters that we have to work within and come up with a way that we think is certainly making some headway in reducing the number of dropouts. Those students that have chosen to drop out of school after we have exhausted all other efforts to encourage them to stay in – what can we do with them that will impact not only our school system but impact those students? So Gateway Recovery is a referral process where students are referred from traditional high schools where they've dropped out. They are in dropout status when received into this program, but we feel that they have a great opportunity to come back in under the school system and actually graduate. And that's the goal of the program."

**Mr. Kyle Ledford, WIA Youth Program Manager** - Mr. Ledford gave an overview of the WIA Gateway Recovery Program. Following is a summary of his comments.

The program is funded by a grant from the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and was implemented in June 2006. It is connected to the Haywood County JobLink Career Center.

The primary purpose of the program is to

- Identify local student dropouts
- Provide alternative learning opportunity leading to the completion of graduation requirements or re-entry to public school

The program is designed, implemented and operated in partnership with Haywood Community College Basic Skills / Adult High School program.

Course credit is awarded by Haywood Community College and accepted by the local board of education for credit leading to high school graduation.



Student application for readmission to public school for completion of graduation requirements

Attainment of GED

The Gateway program allows services to be made available in the sequence which best accommodates the needs of the student. Also, by managing the delivery process, the services are made available at a much reduced cost and a much reduced incidence of duplication.

Mr. Ledford stated that kids drop out for many reasons. The ones that come to his program come because they have social problems, problems at home, or they have to work to support their families. They are pregnant teens and teenage offenders. "One of the things that we are very proud of is that 40% of the kids who leave high school go into remediation but less than 10% of ours have to."

The resources that are needed are small classrooms. The smaller the teacher/student ratio and the smaller the atmosphere, the better chance some students have at being successful. National statistics show that raising the dropout age to 18 is a good idea if you also apply a vast amount of resources behind the effort. I feel like we are a young program but we are really going to grow.

We are currently provided alternative classrooms on a Community College site that is funded through the WIA. At times we run about 30 kids through a GED instruction program and about the same through the WIA Gateway program.

Typically when a student comes to us who is reading below grade level we have reading specialists that we have hired through the college. The students are given intensive reading and math tutoring. They go to class daily only in those subjects where they are deficient and until they can be brought up to a level where they can be successful in the adult high school. Only when they reach those levels are they allowed to enter the adult high school. Some kids don't want to put forth the effort to enter the adult high school so they seek a GED. So we make that happen also. The statistics tell you that kids who leave our high schools stay in our area. These are the kids that are going to live here, pay taxes, fix our cars, and build our homes, etc. so we try to facilitate even a GED. We push 'the next level' for our kids. The GED is a ticket to the next level.

Steve Williams stated that it is important for everyone to understand the definition of a drop out in North Carolina because it's not the same in all states, including most states in the Southeast. "Right now we are reporting in North Carolina drop out data for the 05-06 school year. We've been working on this since the first of October. With all the requirements for properly reporting this it will probably be some time in late January or early February 2007 before all this is official. If a student drops out of school during the school year, and they do not re-enroll in a public school by the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the next school year, then they are counted as a drop out.

The Gateway Recovery Program kicks in for those students who have actually physically dropped out of school. The Gateway Program is not costing our school district anything at this point. We do have some additional money set aside to support the program if we need it. Once these kids drop out then the recovery process begins. A lot of kids have a difficult time in large settings. They do better in small settings. The intent is to try to

going to learn. It will cost more money because if there are more kids in school that would have already been out then that means you will need more classrooms.

**Danny Miller, Principal of Pisgah High** - Mr. Miller said that there should be a single method to determine the dropout rate in the State. For example, the press release announcing this meeting stated that North Carolina's graduation rate is 66%, and then two sentences later it announced that North Carolina's annual drop-out rate is 4.7%. When we get our North Carolina ABC report card and our No Child Left Behind data we also get two different statistics for that. If we can identify one single way to do it, regardless what it is, we can make comparisons from year to year.

The second thing I would like to state is that in high school we are working in an every changing environment. I'm not talking just year to year but almost semester to semester. This is my sixth year as a high school principal and in the time that I have been there we have looked at graduation and exiting high school with the competency test. The competency test is first given in eighth grade and we continue to give it through high school. We did field testing for an exit exam and then never did use the exam. We now operate under courses of study or diploma tracks – there are four of those – which will determine what diploma a student will be given at the end. We have started exit criteria, which is very similar to the elementary/middle school gateways, where you must pass certain end-of-course tests to be promoted to the next grade. With that we are presently giving a US History test that is normed for 40% plus failure. Not success but failure. Just recently I read that consideration is being given to add new additional requirements to the core curriculum. This will include additional math classes and two foreign languages for every student. When we do that, we will have to sacrifice other courses. We are going to have to take children out of programs which are vocational, ROTC, and maybe physical education. I ask that we please choose a reform strategy that is researched-based and go with that strategy long enough to know if it is successful or not. And not the continual change.

Also I request that when we consider reform that we consider our special education students because these are the people who seem to get the short end of the stick. Those children want to feel successful and need to feel successful to be there. And if this is all about dropout prevention we need for you to consider those students. Dropout rate is not singularly a high school issue. I ask that you consider reform across the grades.

If we raise the dropout age to 18 we will have children there who don't want to be there and will be as disruptive as they can be. We have lots of alternatives for those students who need a smaller environment. I have talked with some of our students loosely about this and one of our boys pointed out the fact that "if I have to be here until I'm 18, what I'll do is bring a firearm to school or communicate a bomb threat so you will suspend me for 365 days and I won't have to be here anyway." That was a ninth grader who is not 16 yet, by the way. The last request that I have is that this will require us to deal with many high maintenance students. Please don't give us another unfunded mandate. If we deal with these children we desperately need the resources.

**Dale McDonald, Principal of Tuscola High School** - He stated that at Tuscola there are about 1,248 students and they are on a seven period traditional schedule. They do have classes that are blocked. They have chemistry & biology classes as well as vocational classes that are blocked. The majority of the school's classes are 50 minutes, seven

not see; taking the teachers' special time from those kids who are there, who want to be there, who want an education. If that student is there and has not been suspended yet or is not staying at home hoping to get kicked out with bad attendance, then the teacher is dealing with the disruption in the classroom. She has a very bright student that has a block on taking tests and has failed the competency test four times. He is threatening to drop out. She also recommended reducing competency tests requirements. We need to keep kids in school and alleviate stressors. Don't force a higher age. It will add more problems to the lives of educators."

Ms. Parris stated that students need job skill training. "We need to let students have real life experiences. We have saved kids that have gone out and become productive citizens. That's our goal. I think we should go back to those kids hitting 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 and offer them some alternatives. Offer these kinds of extras and incentives and some job-skill training. Reduce some of these competencies in algebra and geometry and chemistry for the kids that are not going to go that track in life. Give us some leeway in our course offerings so we can give them some real life skills training and not be absorbed by having to meet all of these criteria and meet all of these tests so we can train these kids and give them some opportunities. We used to offer these things at Central Haywood but we can not longer do this because there are too many things to be met and too many tests to be taken and passed until our hands are tied. We can't take them to have some real life experiences like we used to be able to do. And that's hurt our progress. Giving them a chance to be in the community, giving some volunteer services, being on the jobs – doing a little bit of shadowing at the lower levels of school, instead of trying to meet all of the competencies, we could give them some reality checks earlier in life and you wouldn't have worry about what age they need to be before they can quit school. They'd want to be here and wouldn't want to drop out. And we would have them interested and engaged."

**Robin Black, Finance Committee Chairperson for the Haywood County Board of Education** - She proceeded to address three issues regarding drop out prevention. "The first item of importance is reducing the dropout rate by getting and retaining high quality teachers. Teachers have the single most important part in connecting with our students. Haywood County has increased local teacher supplements by .5% each year for the last 4 years in order to match other nearby systems. We have used the refund of sales tax for the last two years to fund the majority of this increase. This year we have not been able to budget this increase because of the removal of this revenue. We appreciate greatly the elimination of the discretionary cuts which provided an additional \$243,000 however by taking away the sales tax refund of \$167,000 we received a net increase of around \$76,000. Please consider reinstating the sales tax exemption for school systems similar to other local government and non-profit entities. While I dearly love NASCAR and am currently in NNROSD "No NASCAR Racing on Sunday Depression", schools across the State need this exemption from a fiscal stand point far worse.

The second item important in reducing the drop out rate is reducing class size and allowing teachers more time with each student. In order to reduce class size, you need more teachers and classrooms. Haywood County currently is funding 3 classroom additions with a recently passed bond. Two of these additions are at new elementary schools that are already short of rooms. In order to reduce class size we need to build more classrooms. With the additional lottery proceeds for school construction, we could accrue enough for classroom additions a one site in 7½ years. However, if the distribution

the tests they give, but he can do the work on the computer. He has a learning disability. He can read but he doesn't understand what he reads. If you can read it to him, he understands it. If you put it on a computer – he's got it. He would be a great computer programmer. He can comprehend from the computer but not if it's on paper. If the teachers had not worked with him he would have dropped out at sixteen. There are many students who just need a little extra help, but without the funding for these resources we are losing them.

**Sue Ann Lindford, Cherokee County Schools** - She stated there is a need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the dropout issue. We need to begin at the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades. We have a program in Cherokee County that is working to identify students in the early grades who are at-risk of dropping out of school. A team consisting of a nurse, a social worker and a counselor are working to help those students with their problems.

"Another problem is that 60% of our job applicants could not pass a drug test to be employed. It doesn't matter how many jobs we recruit in an area, if 60% of our people cannot pass a drug screen [and it's not just Cherokee county, it's the whole western part of the State,] then what value is it going to be to recruit jobs. Of the 40% of those that can be hired, 5% of them, six months later are the only ones still on the job. That's an attendance issue. Those habits are learned early.

There needs to be parent involvement and some type of punishment for parents that don't keep their children in school. This needs to be looked at in a very comprehensive manner. We have to look at it at the early age, we have to intervene in the middle school years, and we have to provide alternatives like the alternative schools and other programs in the later years. I encourage you to look at this very comprehensively beginning in the early years, because it is not just a high school problem."

2. The capacity of a 16-year-old to understand the social and economic consequences of dropping out of school.
3. The emergence of major high school reform efforts, including Learn and Earn Programs, the New Schools Initiative, and 21st Century Schools, and the impact they may have on teenagers who remain in school longer.
4. The importance to the entire State of every student leaving high school prepared to enter the workforce or succeed in higher education.
5. Research on factors related to students' success in school.
6. Strategies, programs, and support services that should be provided if the compulsory school attendance age is raised to enable students to graduate from high school, and time lines for implementing those strategies, programs, and support services.
7. Related laws and policies that must be addressed to ensure the availability of support services for students.
8. The fiscal impact of raising the compulsory attendance age.
9. Possible exemptions from the law for certain students, including those students who fulfill their graduation requirements early and receive a diploma, complete an alternative education program, or whose parents consent to their leaving school before they graduate or reach the maximum compulsory school attendance age.
10. The fiscal impact on the Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Correction.
11. The law in other states and the experience of other states that have raised the compulsory school attendance age.
12. Input on the issue from school personnel, dropouts, and students at risk of dropping out.

Section 4. The Select Committee shall meet upon the call of its Chair. A quorum of the Select Committee shall be a majority of its members, including the Chair.

Section 5. Members of the Select Committee shall receive per diem, subsistence, and travel allowance as provided in G.S. 120-3.1. The expenses of the Select Committee including per diem, subsistence, travel allowances for Select Committee members, and contracts for professional or consultant services shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives pursuant to G.S. 120-32.02(c) and G.S. 120-35 from funds available to the House of Representatives for its operations. Individual expenses of \$5,000 or less, including per diem, travel, and subsistence expenses of members of the Select Committee, and clerical expenses shall be paid upon the authorization of the Chair of the Select Committee. Individual expenses in excess of \$5,000 shall be paid upon the written approval of the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Section 6. The members of the Select Committee serve at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall fill vacancies and may dissolve the Select Committee at any time.

## Appendix C

### ***Nation's Educators Sound the Alarm on School Dropout Crisis***

#### **NEA's Plan for Reducing School Dropouts**

NEA and its 3.2 million members believe every child in America should attend a great public school. It is a basic right of every American. The mission of NEA is to unite our members and the nation to fulfill the promise of public education that prepares every student to succeed in a global society.

We also believe that providing great public schools for every child is the shared responsibility of NEA and its 3.2 million members/educators, as well as parents, families, communities, businesses, and government at the national, state, and local levels.

NEA has developed 12 action steps to address the nation's school dropout crisis. While there are many ways to address this problem, NEA has chosen steps that are the most promising based on a wide range of experience and data.

#### **NEA's 12 Dropout Action Steps:**

1. **Mandate high school graduation or equivalency as compulsory for everyone below the age of 21.** Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 in the beginning of the 20th century, it is appropriate and critical to eradicate the idea of "dropping out" before achieving a diploma. To compete in the 21st century, all of our citizens, at minimum, need a high school education.
2. **Establish high school graduation centers for students 19-21 years old** to provide specialized instruction and counseling to all students in this older age group who would be more effectively addressed in classes apart from younger students.
3. **Make sure students receive individual attention** in safe schools, in smaller learning communities within large schools, in small classes (18 or fewer students), and in programs during the summer, weekends, and before and after school that provide tutoring and build on what students learn during the school day.
4. **Expand students' graduation options** through creative partnerships with community colleges in career and technical fields and with alternative schools so that students have another way to earn a high school diploma. For students who are incarcerated, tie their release to high school graduation at the end of their sentences.
5. **Increase career education and workforce readiness programs in schools** so that students see the connection between school and careers after graduation. To ensure that students have the skills they need for these careers, integrate 21st century skills into the curriculum and provide all students with access to 21st century technology.

## **Appendix D**

### **Cohort Graduation Rate**

#### **The rate for a school will be calculated as follows:**

Students who graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006  
(and are included below)

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Students in the school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2002-03\*  
Plus students who transferred into the school in the grade  
appropriate to the cohort\*\*  
Minus students who transferred out of the school and  
students who are deceased\*\*\*

#### **The rate for an LEA will be calculated as follows:**

Students who graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006  
(and are included below)

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Students in the LEA in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2002-03\*  
Plus students who transferred into the LEA in the grade  
appropriate to the cohort\*\*  
Minus students who transferred out of the LEA  
and students who are deceased\*\*\*

#### **The rate for the state will be calculated as follows:**

Students who have graduated with a diploma prior to June 30, 2006  
(and are included below)

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Students in the state in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade in 2002-03\*  
Plus students who transferred into the state in the grade  
appropriate to the cohort\*\*  
Minus students who transferred out of the state  
and students who are deceased\*\*\*

#### **Notes:**

\* Only includes those students who are in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade for the first time.

\*\* Students who were in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2001-02 and transfer in as a  
9<sup>th</sup> grader in 2002-03  
10<sup>th</sup> grader in 2003-04  
11<sup>th</sup> grader in 2004-05  
12<sup>th</sup> graders in 2005-06

\*\*\* Students who transfer out are those who have not been reported as having  
dropped out and the school has received a records request from an educational institution,  
public or private in North Carolina or another state.

**Dropout students count as non-graduates unless they enroll in another school on  
track at some point.**

**The state rate is not the average of the LEA or school rates.**